On Becoming a Personal Anarchist

By
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The term "anarchy" is typically used in the political context, in relation to a philosophy espousing the abolition of all established governments. The word typically elicits images of bombs, violence, disorder and chaos. The etymology of the word, however, reveals a more benign image. The term literally means "without ruler," and a deeper analysis of the term shows that the root "archos", from which "ruler" evolved, originally meant "first." The first form that evolved ("archetype") became the model or pattern. Thus, more fundamentally, "anarchy" may refer to a system which functions without reliance on established rules or patterns.

The Anarchist Insight

Anarchist philosophy (Read, 1971) is based on the role of freedom and equality as necessary factors for facilitating human progress, which is measured by the degree of articulation and differentiation among the individuals within a society. This definition of progress is reflected in Kelly's (1979a) proposition that human evolution is continuing at an accelerating pace and that humans participate in it through continual elaboration of construction systems for understanding the universe. For Read (1971) this process of elaboration and differentiation can enable the person to develop "a wider and deeper apprehension of the significance and scope of human existence (p. 37)," and become a productive participant in human progress. From this perspective, the social group functions as a means, an expedient aid which may provide a base from which evolution can occur. Progress only comes, however, through division and differentiation from the group.

As personal consciousness evolves from the relationship between the individual and the group a sense of mutuality and compassion develops, based on the natural human tendency to attempt to discover the laws of nature and live in harmony with them. "The most general law in nature is equity - the principle of

balance and symmetry which guides the growth of forms along the lines of the greatest structural efficiency (Read, 1971, p. 41)." Anarchist philosophy suggests that when the principle of equity is followed, and constructs are revised to correspond more closely to events, human social conduct will naturally be "moral" and co-operative. In contrast, behavior that fails to adapt to the nature of events leads to conflict and "immoral" behavior toward others, such as hostility (Kelly, 1971b). This natural sense of proper conduct becomes distorted when it is modified into moral laws which are then institutionalized into religious, legal, and political organizations. The natural "instincts" become deformed by being rigidly defined and ultimately inhibited by the weight of the structure:

The organic life of the group, a self-regulative life like the life of all organic entities, is stretched on the rigid frame of a code. It ceases to be life in any real sense, and only functions as convention, conformity, and discipline (Read, 1971, p. 40).

The tendency of the state is to establish a system of statutory laws in which there is no opportunity for the more natural and flexible reliance on the basic principle of equity. Under anarchism the principle of equity would supercede statutory law.

Sarason (1976) summarized the central insight of anarchism:

1. The central state (and its governmental apparatus) by its very nature and dynamics inevitably becomes a force alien to the interests of its people, and the stronger the state becomes the more it enslaves people in the sense that they are required, they are forced, to do things they do not want to do, i.e., there is a dilution in the personal sense of autonomy. The rhetoric of the state is one thing; its actual operations are something else again.

2. The more powerful the state becomes, the more its people look to it as the fount of initiative and succour, the more is the psychological sense of community diluted. That is to say, the more the lives of people are a consequence of decisions made in "The Castle" the more they are robbed of those communal bonds

and responsibility upon which the sense of rootedness is built (p. 251).

A major implication of the anarchist insight is that any form which evolves to serve a human need must be entirely ad hoc in nature and must never be allowed to develop into an "institution." This notion has had a strong following among those Personal Construct Psychologists who have resisted the formation of a formal PCP organization, suggesting that it would come to have institutional qualities that would impede the natural evolution of the theory. Similarly, once an institution has developed it must be abandoned or "destroyed" to allow the more natural state of affairs to assert itself once again.

Although the concept of anarchy has most frequently been applied to political settings, its central insight that human progress is impeded by reliance on rules or forms may be extended more broadly to apply to such contexts as science and community psychology.

Science and Anarchy

Several philosophers and historians of science have criticized the emphasis in science on adherence to strict rules regarding how scientific knowledge is to be accepted as valid. Kuhn (1970) described the nature of change in scientific disciplines and proposed the concept of a "paradigm" as representing the global world view which characterizes a scientific discipline. Among other things, the paradigm includes rules by which the science is to be conducted and examples of "appropriate" problems and methodology. Polanyi (1958), however, in presenting what he called a "post-critical" theory of knowledge, proposed that there is no way to specify beforehand rules by which knowledge might be discovered. According to Polanyi's analysis of scientific progress, discovery is rooted in the scientist's personal awareness of coherence among what have previously been seen as unrelated events. It is the scientist's deeply held belief of being in personal contact with a yet

unknown but potentially real entity which drives scientific discovery, and there is no way to anticipate the evidence which will eventually justify and support a new idea.

Feyerabend (1978) suggested that the scientific practice of relying on rules of methodology and proof often hinders scientific progress and in fact does not reflect the way it has actually proceeded throughout history. His historical research showed no support for the idea that science proceeds according to ". . . a method that contains firm, unchanging, and absolutely binding principles (p. 23)" Any such rules that have been proposed have been violated at one time or another, and there are instances in which these violations were responsible for the growth of knowledge. He proposed a philosophy of knowledge, called "epistemological anarchy," which argues that since it is impossible to determine any rules by which scientific conduct can be guided, " the only rule that does not inhibit progress is anything goes (p. 23)."

The tendency to follow rules for scientific research has been a particularly acute problem for psychology. Kelly (l970) commented eloquently on psychology's self-conscious concern with scientific respectability and the emphasis on appearing scientifically rigorous. He proposed that psychologists would be more effective if they would abandon the attempt to follow a priori rules of methodology, emulating the procedures of the physical sciences, and use whatever methods they might invent to pursue their inquiry. He suggested that if psychologists were at all successful in this endeavor the scientific community would be most prompt in acknowledging their findings.

Bakan (1973), in a broad-ranging critique of psychological methodology, developed this theme more fully. He likened the relationship between "real science" and psychological investigation to that between "real cowboys" and children playing at being cowboys. By concentrating on following particular rules and models of scientific methodology psychologists imitate the behavior of scientists without doing

the most important thing that real scientists do, which is to confront their subject directly and creatively. Bakan characterized psychology's approach to research as "methodolatry," a practice akin to idolatry in religion. For Bakan, idolatry occurs when a particular form which evolves in the human quest for deeper understanding of the universe comes to be seen as an end in itself. It is this sense of idolatry that the anarchist position seeks to abolish by refusing to worship any particular form.

Community Psychology and Anarchy

Human services may also become "institutionalized" in ways that impede their ability to further human progress. Sarason (1974) proposed the "psychological sense of community" as the primary criterion for the ability of society to support and nurture the individual, thus aiding the continuing evolution of humankind. By this concept, Sarason refers to the sense that one was part of a readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships upon which one could depend and as a result of which one did not experience sustained feelings of loneliness that impel one to actions or to adopting a style of living masking anxiety and setting the stage for later and more destructive anguish (p. 1).

From this perspective the validity of any human service setting is dependent on whether it enhances this sense of community among its members. The task of community psychology is to work to facilitate this sense through a respect for individual differences and facilitation of equitable access to human resources (Rappaport, 1977). Commitment to the community psychology perspective may lead to radical alteration of existing human service institutions.

Sarason (1974) described an example of how the institutionalization of human services interfered with those very needs, and weakened the psychological sense of community among those involved. In Connecticut, a state-supported

regional center school for the mentally retarded was to be built, but while the funds were in the appropriation process, and construction of the facility was undertaken, a "temporary" approach to serving the needs of the clients on the emergency waiting list was needed. A task force was appointed to devise a solution to this problem and within a short period of time they discovered ways to provide the services within the communities where the individuals lived, using local resources. In the process, the task force discovered that there was actually no need for the regional center. Moreover, the center would be detrimental to the needs of both the clients and the community at large, since it would result in the removal of the retarded people from their local communities, leading to a loss of a healthy psychological sense of community for both the retarded people and the community members who had come to their aid during the "temporary" program. By the time the task force became aware of the superiority of alternative community-based treatment programs, the center had already become an "institution," and it became clear that the needs of the community would take second priority to the structure of the institution. Thus, the center became a reality even though it was counter to the needs of the community it was supposed to serve.

Personal Anarchy

The preceding discussion has touched briefly on ways in which the construct of anarchy may be applied in political, scientific, and community arenas, but this discussion has been intended primarily to set the ground for drawing a metaphor from the social to the personal. The use of metaphor as a way to entertain alternative ways of looking at the human situation has a rich history in Personal Construct Psychology (Mair, 1977b). Metaphor provides a vehicle through which an unknown or partly known event may be propositionally construed in terms of constructs that already have meaning and utility.

"Science" and "Community" are topics that have been used by Personal Construct Psychologists to draw metaphorical

connections with the individual. Kelly (1955) used the "personal scientist" metaphor, which suggests that people in general may be usefully understood as behaving similarly to scientists, as the basis for the Psychology of Personal Constructs. Mair (1977a) proposed "the community of self" as a metaphor in which various facets of an individual can be seen as representing a "community." In analogous fashion, the "personal anarchist" metaphor proposes that "institutionalization" of our personal constructs may come to impede, rather than enhance, ability to differentiate and elaborate the perceptual field. Relying on personal constructs as "rules" or "codes" may lead to personal difficulties, distortions, and rigidities analogous to those discussed in political, scientific, and community settings.

Development of "Self"

The process through which constructs may become an institution is rooted in their origin, and the sense of self that evolves with the construing process. The initial purpose of construing is to serve a person's desire to make the world more understandable and to anticipate events effectively. In proposing the Psychology of Personal Constructs, Kelly (1955) emphasized that the construing process was a practical one that exists for this very applied purpose. It is a real world of real events for which this process is used and to be most effective constructs must continually evolve toward a closer match with events. Central to this dynamic process is Kelly's philosophical and epistemological assumption, constructive alternativism, which emphasizes that ideas are never to be "institutionalized" but always open to revision or replacement, easily abandoned to make way for a new order. This tentative, ad hoc nature of constructs clearly parallels the similar anarchist conception. Further, Kelly's assumption of a dynamic, ever-changing universe offers more support for the requirement that effective construing must be flexible, and always open to change.

One aspect of personal construing that has had positive practical advantages is the construction of a self. In order to anticipate

events that will occur in the future, the person must have the ability to imagine that future and a possible personal role in it. This requires a concept, or construct, of the self who will experience this future. Kelly (1955) described the self as the core structure, a set of constructs which exist for the purpose of anticipating personal maintenance processes. There are two central elements to this conception of the self. One is the notion that the self is a portion of the person's processes but does not represent their totality. Additionally, the "self" requires personal awareness; to have a self construct is to be conscious of the self as the subject of experience. Stated another way, without a self concept there is no consciousness as the term is typically understood.

There is some general agreement regarding processes underlying the development of self consciousness. Jaynes (1976) proposed that awareness of the self, as a conscious agent responsible for making choices and guiding actions toward the future, appeared rather recently in human evolution, perhaps no more than three thousand years ago. One of the central points to Jaynes' theory of the origin of consciousness is that it developed subsequent to the use of language. He presented a persuasive argument demonstrating that human beings could have existed with language, thought, reason, and learning, yet with no sense of self consciousness or awareness of an "I" who was responsible for the actions.

Wilber (l980; 1982), in reviews of theories of development and evolution, also suggested that the self is a social artifact that evolves in parallel with language. As a child develops the ability to use verbal symbols, particularly those relating to the self, personal identity changes from a body-self to a mental-self. This change signifies the beginning of the ego stage of development when the person comes to identify almost exclusively with his socially determined mental ego, with its appropriate verbal symbols, as a constantly present reminder of identity.

This emerging identity as a mental self is very useful in enhancing ability to anticipate the future, since it creates a sense of a fixed, permanent entity who will experience future events. Without this sense of self humans would be at the mercy of the immediate environment, following habitual patterns and unable to transcend immediate needs to make choices or anticipate events in the distant future. The development of this self-consciousness, then, was a major evolutionary step in increasing human ability to survive effectively in a wide range of environmental circumstances.

Self as "Institution"

This sense of self consciousness, however, is a double-edged sword. In addition to its utility, there are potential hazards to exclusive identification with the ego that can impede, rather than enhance, ability to deal effectively with the ever-changing universe. Angyal (1982) described the tendency of the self to attempt to control and manage the total personality organization:

The conscious self which is only a part, namely the conscious or symbolized part of the biological subject, tends to establish its own autonomous government. What we call "will" represents autonomous determination, the self-government of this narrow conscious or symbolic self. The symbolic self becomes a state within a state. Thus a split is created within the subject organization. This split is greatly aggravated by the fact that the symbolic self tends toward hegemony, tends to take over the government of the total personality, a task for which it is not equipped (p.35-6).

Up to this point, the self structure has been described as the conscious, verbally labeled portion of the person. Much of this self structure, however, is not accessible to awareness. Kelly (1955) described a number of ways in which "covert construction" can occur. Several "covert" facets of the self are particularly relevant. First, there are constructs associated with experiences that occurred prior to the development of language

and continue to be used in spite of the lack of consistent word symbols. Kelly described these as "pre-verbal constructs." Second there are constructs that developed overtly at one point in the person's life but are incompatible with the current self organization. These constructs have become "suspended" (Kelly, 1955). Although the person may not have awareness of these experiences, they continue to exert an influence on behavior, and may represent unconscious "rules" that are followed automatically. A third form of covert construction is what Wilber (1983) called the "embedded unconscious," the "rules" that govern the operation of the core structure but are not available to self awareness because of the complete identification of the self with those structures.

The self (cannot) see those structures because the self (is) those structures....No observing structure can observe itself observing. One uses the structures of that level as something with which to perceive and translate the world-- but one cannot perceive and translate those structures themselves (Wilber, 1983, p. 112).

Thus, in both conscious and unconscious ways, the self, originally a servant of the person, becomes an "institution" that has lost its original goal and now consists of a set of rules or models that are followed regardless of whether they are an appropriate match to the events with which the person is confronted. The task of personal anarchy is to destroy this institution in such a way that the person may continue the process of evolution.

Fomenting Personal Insurrection

Anarchist philosophy draws a distinction between revolution and insurrection (Read, 1971). Revolution refers to the replacement of one form of governmental structure with another and the term is etymologically rooted in the concept of "rolling" or "rotating." In essence, revolution can be seen as a circular process by which one method or form is replaced with another in a "revolving" fashion. Insurrection is an action against all

forms of state structure, and its etymological roots suggest a "throwing off" of any form. In discussing various methods through which human consciousness evolves to higher forms, Wilber (1983) drew a similar distinction between changes of form within the same level of consciousness ("translation") and evolution to a higher level ("transformation"). For genuine transformation to occur, there must be a "dying of the self" at the current level, a "personal insurrection" in which all forms of self structure at that level of organization are "overthrown" in order to be transcended.

Before a self structure can be transcended, however, a functioning self organization must exist, just as political insurrection would not occur in the absence of an existing state structure. The self structure can be seen in this context as a universal stage in personal evolution, which develops to serve useful and necessary purposes, but may eventually become an empty form that hinders the evolutionary function. This stage or level of evolution cannot be avoided and thus approaches to personal insurrection must follow, rather than precede, the development of an effective, functioning self organization.

Given the existence of a functional self structure, the concept of personal insurrection may be applied to the weakening or dissolution of exclusive identification with the conscious, symbolized self structure, and its covert, "unconscious" components. In a sense, personal insurrection is a personal application of constructive alternativism, for it represents a conscious, aggressive approach to following Kelly's assumption that constructs are revisable and replaceable. The goal is not to destroy the ability to deal effectively with the real world. Rather, the task is to facilitate continuing differentiation and elaboration of personal functioning, integration of the verbally symbolized self with remaining personal processes, and a sense of personal identification that transcends individual boundaries. The ultimate goal of personal anarchy is to remain fresh and open, perennially ready to deal with moment-to-moment reality in new and effective ways without rigid reliance on pre-existing rules.

There are numerous potential approaches to this process, only a few of which will be discussed here. Their common core is an emphasis on self-knowledge for the purpose of self-transcendence. This goal may be differentiated from that of personal improvement. Although many techniques and practices may be used for both purposes, the goal of self-improvement is to make the self "better" while the goal of self-transcendence is to study the self, to see its basic structure so that it ceases to have the governing role in life. Personal anarchy may be approached through the vehicle of psychotherapy. Although it is typically used to assist a person in developing a strong, effective self structure and to overcome maladaptive patterns which inhibit healthy functioning, psychotherapy may also be used to assist the personal anarchist to develop self knowledge that can weaken the hold that the self structure has on the entire personality.

Meditation practices, derived from eastern perspectives on psychology, represent another tool for gaining the Self-knowledge necessary to personal anarchy, and several facets of the relationship between Eastern approaches and PCP have been elaborated (McWilliams, 1983; 1984). The purpose of Zen meditation, for example, is to study the "self" to observe its ever-changing nature and the transparent quality of dualistic construing. Through this process, the "self" is "forgotten," allowing the person to express a more basic nature through living in harmony with ordinary daily life (Aitken, 19S2).

From the Personal Construct Psychology perspective, anarchist self knowledge may be approached through the use of techniques oriented toward making covert construction overt. Many of the methods related to the repertory grid technique (Fransella & Bannister, 1977) may be applied to the anarchist end. Construct elicitation, laddering of superordinate constructs, and grid analysis methods that display the "meta structure" of the construct system may all be used to assist greater awareness of the covert "rules" and "organization" that control the construction of events. Boxer's (1979; 1980) approach to

"reflexive learning" represents one method by which repertory grid techniques can be directed toward studying the process, rather than the content, of construing.

Some Closing Comments

Metaphors and similes, parables and comparisons may be used to describe anything belonging to the relative, the intellectually dichotomized world, but even the simplest and commonest experience of reality, the touch of hot water, the smell of camphor, are incommunicable by such or any means; how much more so the Fatherhood of God, the Meaningless of Meaning, the Absolute Value of a popcorn...(Blyth, 1976).

To be used to its best advantage, a metaphor should be taken lightly and quickly for it is at best an incomplete and only suggestive construction. The personal anarchist metaphor is no exception, and is intended only to propose some alternative ways of construing the human situation. Few specific techniques have been mentioned, and then quite briefly. This is in keeping with the anarchist insight for, ultimately, there can be no rules governing a personal anarchist.

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